

EPIPHANY 2 – 2009

2nd Thessalonians 2: 13 – 17

People drift away from the Apostolic Gospel. If they do not get back to a faithful hearing, reading, learning of God's Word quite quickly, they are soon gone! Eventually they, in one way or another, fall for the great religious lie, always promoted by Satan, long officially taught within Christianity on earth, a great delusion, that salvation into eternal life ultimately is dependent on human goodness, or human decision, or human obedience.

So, Paul, as always, calls on Christians to stand firm and to hold to the teachings he and the other Apostles have passed along to us. That is the Scripture. Paul promotes this standing firm and holding tight by holding in front of us the great blessings that God gives through His Gospel.

To Share in Jesus' Glory, Continue in His Truth!

The Gospel, the Good News, is that truth. A couple verses earlier Paul wrote that many people were perishing. Why? Paul says, "They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved." The truth that saves is the Gospel of Jesus. The Apostle John tells us the good news that Jesus, the Word made flesh, the one and only eternal Son, came here from the Father, came here 'full of grace and truth'. John and Paul often use the term 'truth' especially for the Gospel, because only the Gospel can save anyone from sin and death by Christ's forgiveness, righteousness, and life.

God's Commandments, God's rules for living, are God's truth, too, of course. But those holy, good, and perfect laws are able to save no sinner from his/her sin. God's Commandments serve the Gospel. When we take God's will about how He wants us to think, talk, and act to heart, our heart quickly becomes afraid, terrified, because we come to see just how sinful we are, how very far we are from living the way the Holy God wants. It is then that the Good News of our Redeemer/Savior rescues us with the righteousness Jesus Christ lived for us and with the forgiveness He earned for us by His holy and divine death on the cross. Jesus' resurrection from the death He died under all of the world's sin assures us of full forgiveness and life. This is the Gospel and it moved us to trust in Jesus as our Savior.

Of course, if we think of God's Commandments only in a shallow way, with half an ear, we will completely buy into the big, religious lie, that we can, by our good doing or by some inner spiritual light, satisfy God on our own to give us immortality. Such inner light is nothing but the glow of the fire of hell.

The genuine Gospel has been passed down to us by the Apostles. It was given to them by the Lord Jesus, from the Father, through the Holy Spirit's miracle called inspiration. The Gospel is God's work. The fact that we have it is God's work. And the fact that we believe it is God's work.

Not only did God, from the beginning, indeed from eternity, choose us to be saved, He did this choosing and saving through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. Sanctifying work means work that makes us holy. That is not our work. That is the Spirit's work. As the eternal Spirit does His sanctifying, He works belief in the truth of the Gospel. The Gospel makes us holy in Jesus, the Holy One.

Thank the Lord being saved does not depend on our weak efforts, on our feeble hands. From the beginning to completion our rescue from sin and death relies on God's strength, holiness, and wisdom.

What is the completion of our rescue from sin and death? Well, the ultimate goal, the destination of it is put this way in these verses, "that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." That is awesome! We really cannot even grasp the glory of our Lord. It is the everlasting glory of God, shared perfectly by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God's glory somehow includes everything that is true about God.

And that is what Jesus wishes to share with us sinners. It almost seems wrong to say that. We do not even deserve to have fellowship with God. We are sinful people. Yet, on account of Jesus, God's intention and wish is to have us share forever in our Lord's glory. Peter says the same thing, that God has given us His very great and precious promises so that through those promises we may participate in, have fellowship with, 'share in the divine nature'. My goodness! Just imagine basking in the eternal and divine glories of Jesus forever! That is what God, by the Gospel, through faith, will give every believer in Jesus' Good News.

But no Christian need wait until then to begin rejoicing in our Lord's Gospel blessings. Already now, every believer in Jesus has the assurance that God loved him/her in our Savior. Already now the Gospel, the saving truth of God, gives us eternal encouragement and good hope.

The sin in us, the devil's prowling around, the spiritually rebellious world where we live all aim to make trouble – no, more than that – to destroy God's people. They will try by all means to get us to take our eyes off Jesus. They do not care where else we focus, just so long as it is not Jesus. But as long as we stand on the firm foundation of the Apostle-provided Gospel and hold tightly to it, God will assure us, God will give us the good, sure, living hope, God will strengthen and encourage our hearts and will strengthen us in every good deed and word.

If we ever fall for the lie that we must at least contribute something to getting saved, no true, God-approved, good deed or word will be produced, not one. But when Jesus alone fills our salvation screen, then He will strengthen us to do those good deeds and to say those good words.

You truly ought always to thank God for every Christian, including your own faith and life in Jesus. Why? Because God alone established our salvation from the beginning until we forever share in Christ's glory. He made the Gospel. By the Gospel, through faith He creates, God makes us sure of His love, by grace encourages us with eternal good hope, and strengthens us for our new living. He provides us everything we need for faith and new life now and for having Christ's glory forever.

This is why we need to stand firm and hold on tight to the teachings God has given us by His Apostles. Love God's Word. Love God's written truth so that He can save you. Amen.